

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Rep. Pete Stark introduced The Building Secure and Healthy Families Act of 2003 to counter Republican marriage promotion proposals that fail to address the root causes of poverty. It has the support of over 80 social advocacy groups. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) is introducing companion legislation in the Senate.

“When it comes to helping poor families, Republicans are paying attention to the right problem, but they have the wrong answer,” Stark said. “The Republican fixation on fighting poverty with marriage has more to do with imposing their ‘old time religion’ than advocating real solutions to real problems. It’s a simple fact: forcing welfare recipients into marriage does nothing to address the underlying causes of poverty that land people on welfare in the first place.”

The Building Secure and Healthy Families Act would offer, as an alternative to Republican marriage proposals, a \$100 million grant for states to use flexibly to correctly address the needs of poor families. The grant would allow states to direct funds to successful programs that enhance income, reduce teen pregnancy, or build family stability through employment assistance and support for child care, mental health and substance abuse counseling. Stark’s bill would also amend welfare law to require new child protections and encourage states to more actively address violence in families.

“You can’t have secure and healthy families without first addressing the security and health of parents,” Stark said. “Family stability requires sustainable income and employment supports that many state welfare programs do not promote effectively. Many more programs don’t adequately address the barriers imposed by teen pregnancy, domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental illness. My bill gives states the funding to invest in innovative programs that help families confront these issues head on with the tools to ensure they are healthy and economically secure.”